



Representative Jeff Morris

**Washington State
House of Representatives**

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Telecommunications & Energy

Finance

Transportation

Past President, Pacific Northwest
Economic Region

Representative Jeff Morris

2004 Session Report to the 40th District

Dear Neighbors:

Short and business-like would best describe the recently concluded legislative session. For the first time in many years we didn't have to rebuild a budget from the ground because of an initiative driving cuts or spending.

While brief, it was a productive session that brought closure to a number of issues I have been working on to represent you in Olympia.

Foremost was securing tax relief for the Intalco Alcoa plant in Whatcom County until electricity prices go down. High-paying family wage jobs are hard to come by these days. Working with the Whatcom County legislators, I was able to guide a package through the Legislature that will send a clear signal that we want Alcoa to keep the plant open in Whatcom County.

This tax break was needed because electricity is part of aluminum. The aluminum industry is the canary in the coal mine when it comes to electricity prices.

The mantra I use in the committee I chair—Technology, Telecommunications and Energy—is that we need to focus on encouraging investment in Washington state. To that end, I was able to work with the business community and the governor's office to pass a law regarding mitigation of carbon dioxide, CO². The law we passed does our part to cut emissions, but also provides certainty to the business community that in turn encourages investment in electric generation in Washington state.

The State Senate continues to be a source of frustration. I was able to pass out of the House a number of transportation items important to the district that the State Senate stripped out of the transportation budget.

It was a busy productive session. Dave Quall, my seatmate from the 40th, and I were able to move a number of issues forward for the District. It is a privilege to represent you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeff Morris". The signature is stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being large and prominent.

Jeff Morris



Representative Jeff Morris

CREATING GOOD JOBS

Protecting high-wage aluminum industry jobs will benefit our state. The aluminum industry has suffered a steep decline as the Northwest's relatively low cost energy rates have gone up in the past few years. Of the nine major aluminum plants that were operating in 1998, only one is still producing aluminum and only two Alcoa plants (in Wenatchee and Ferndale) continue to provide a significant number of jobs.

We passed a bill that will give temporary tax relief to aluminum companies. These incentives will end Dec. 31, 2006, after Bonneville Power Administration energy rates are likely to be lowered. Accountability standards require smelters to report the number of jobs at the end of the calendar year to determine the effectiveness of the legislation.

We needed to send a clear message that our state was willing to partner with Alcoa to keep the Whatcom County plant open. Hopefully the incentive will be enough. If the smelter lines shut down, regardless of how good rates might be from BPA in 2006, the plant would not re-open because of the large upfront costs of starting a smelter line.

Besides the direct economic gain, our entire region earns extra benefits from keeping these aluminum smelters open. They have unique operating characteristics that help keep our lights on. If we keep them running, there is less chance of a catastrophe like the blackout on the East Coast last year.

Other bills that create or retain jobs!

- I led the charge the last few years on research and development tax incentives for high technology clusters in our state. This vital incentive was finally passed and signed by the Governor.
- We encouraged job growth in rural communities with tax incentives for software producers and call centers.
- We invested in higher education and worker training in the capital budget. Bellingham Technical College can build an automotive repair and welding instructional building with \$14 million, and Western Washington University will remove hazardous asbestos and make other renovations to the classrooms in Bond Hall with \$4.9 million.
- Road projects were accelerated on the Guide Meridian (SR 539) near Bellingham, and on new I-5 HOV lanes near Everett, to make sure the projects are completed in time for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. We need to be poised to move tourists around our region so they will return to visit in the future. We can't afford to miss our chance to make 17 days into 17 years of economic benefit.



INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Higher Education is tied to our state's economy. We can create jobs, but we must have educated people who can fill 21st century positions. The Competitiveness Council, designed to explore ways to improve Washington's business climate, recommended higher ed investments as a key to the future.

I supported this year's supplemental budget that gave money for 3,000 new slots in colleges and universities. A third of the funding opens up doors for more engineering, high-tech, biotech and nursing positions.

I closely support my seatmate Dave Quall who chairs the House Education Committee. Dave will report more to you about K-12 education but here is a list of issues passed this session:

- Fixes to the state's K-12 assessment system, the WASL, which students must pass to graduate beginning in 2008.
- New focus for the Learning Assistance Program (LAP), a program that drives funds to underserved schools.
- School levy formula changes.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Medicaid premiums removed for low-income kids

Working together, lawmakers crafted a sensible approach to virtually eliminate premiums on children's Medicaid coverage. While not perfect, we made sure no family on Medicaid earning less than 150 percent of the poverty level (currently \$23,000 a year for a family of three) will pay premiums for their kids to access health care.

Without coverage, kids are more likely to miss school or end up in emergency rooms for preventable illnesses. The resulting costs are far greater than the annual cost of providing Medicaid coverage for kids, especially as 7 out of 10 of uninsured kids live in families with a working parent or guardian.

2004 Session Report

TRANSPORTATION

Ferry security and long-term ferry improvements are huge issues for our state. We passed a supplemental budget that funds studies to determine the state's role in passenger-only ferries, public-private partnerships, a long-term plan for terminals (including revenue-generating opportunities), and reasonable fees for San Juan Islands residents.



I have not been more frustrated in Olympia than dealing with the Senate on transportation issues. We in the House initiated plans that looked at why we don't have enough life boats on our state ferries; limited our exposure to rising fuel prices in the ferry system which leads to increased ferry fares; and started the process of synchronizing traffic lights on Highway 20 between Anacortes and Burlington. All were removed from the budget by the Senate.

This follows on the heels of the Senate last year removing language that would have kept year-round service to Sidney, B.C.

They are set in their ways in the Senate. While many people have been there decades, they have been resistant to changing the way we do business in transportation. I will continue to pursue reforms that make our transportation system safer and more efficient.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Combating global warming and reducing carbon dioxide emissions

The Legislature passed landmark legislation I introduced, putting in place measures that will ensure we are making our contribution to reduce global warming and giving the business community certainty for investment by having one clear standard in lowering carbon dioxide emissions.

U.S. power plants make up 10% of CO₂ pollution world-wide, known to contribute to global warming. I want to note that our state currently has one of the lowest CO₂ emission rates in the world because of large hydropower resources. This law will keep it that way.

We will now require fossil-fueled power plants to make payments to organizations or projects that reduce air pollution. Plants with a generating capacity of 25 megawatts or more must mitigate 20% of the CO₂ emissions the plant produces over 30 years. New plants must also mitigate their emissions.

As an example, money from CO₂ mitigation could be used for grants to cities that make buses less-polluting, purchases of large stands of trees that won't be cut down, or investments in renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.



Photo courtesy of National Renewable Energy Lab.

I want to point out that BP, with an oil refinery at Cherry Point, was critical in moving this issue ahead in the business community. Without them and the governor this bill would not have passed into law.

We are not going to stop global warming alone nor will this law do it. But this new CO₂ mitigation law is the equivalent of our state putting out a recycling bin on the curb for collection — we are doing our part.

Building more renewable energy sources

Recent polling indicates over 90% of Washington residents favor increased reliance on renewable energy and energy efficiency. Businesses would also lower operating costs by increased energy efficiency, our state would gain construction and engineering jobs, and cleaner energy would improve the environment.

We introduced a bill this year to promote renewable and efficient energy sources that could create family-wage jobs in urban and rural areas and increase income for farmers. It would have also improved our country's security by lowering dependence on foreign energy sources.

The bill didn't pass this year, but I'm dedicated to finding a balanced renewable energy solution that will make it through the Legislature. It just makes sense to have home-grown energy that puts much-needed money and jobs back into our state.



Representative Jeff Morris • 40th District

Vehicle Innovator Honored

Dr. Michael Seal, long-time engineering professor at Western Washington University and innovator of experimental vehicles, was honored with a House of Representatives resolution introduced by Rep. Morris in March.

Dr. Seal's excellent research will inspire a legacy of creativity and innovation in the automotive world. Seal, founder and director for three decades of Western Washington University's nationally renowned Vehicle Research Institute, is preparing to retire after 35 years of dedicated full-time teaching at WWU.

You can visit the Vehicle Research Institute on the Web at:
<http://vri.etec.wvu.edu/>



Pictured above is one of the program's vehicles – the Viking 29, a thermo-photo-voltaic hybrid – that was on display at the Capital campus. The car runs on natural gas and electric cells. In the photo are (clockwise from front) Rep. Morris, WWU President Karen Morse, Rep. Kelli Linville (D-Bellingham), Rep. Dave Quall (D-Mt. Vernon), Sen. Harriet Spaul (D-Bellingham), Dr. Michael Seal, and his wife Eileen Seal.